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# The Case Against Reincarnation

## Part 3

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### Paul Edwards

**L**unatic theories may be divided into those that are dreary and those that are fun. Heidegger's assorted pronouncements about death, if taken literally, are prominent specimens of the former. One of the most enjoyable examples of the latter is the theory of the astral body, to which I briefly referred in Part 2. When we turn to what I call the "interregnum" problem—the question of how a person subsists in the interval between death in one regular body and birth in a new one—it will become clear that invoking the astral body is a natural and by no means illogical move. Professor Geddes MacGregor, who as a professional philosopher has a much better grasp of questions relating to personal identity than other reincarnationists, is ready to champion the astral body in spite of its "occult" associations. Most forms of reincarnationism are indissolubly linked to the astral body, as their protagonists readily admit, and I will try to show that this by itself is a sufficient reason for rejecting them. Reading about the astral body has given me so much pleasure that I would like to be able to say something kind about it. Unfortunately I cannot oblige: on examination the theory turns out to be just as hopelessly absurd as it seems at first sight to all sane people.

What is the astral body and why should anybody believe in its existence except that it helps the cause of reincarnation? The astral body, in the words of the late Dr. Robert Crookall, who until his recent much-lamented death was generally re-

garded as the foremost astral theorist, is a "non-physical," "second" body that is the " 'double' or duplicate of the physical body" ("Out-of-the-Body Experiences and Survival," in J. D. Pearce-Higgins and G. S. Whitby, eds., *Life, Death, and Psychological Research*, p. 67). The more primitive and philosophically illiterate believers frequently identify it with consciousness or the soul, but this is clearly absurd since consciousness and the soul (regardless of whether these are treated as the same thing) do not possess size, shape, and location the way the duplicate of our physical body would have to do. Dr. Crookall realizes that the astral theory must seem "incredible to 'common sense' people," but this only means that they are unfamiliar with the extensive evidence in its favor.

### Bilocations and OBEs

**T**his evidence is twofold. In the first place, "innumerable men, women and children have . . . had the experience of leaving their [regular] bodies temporarily and eventually re-entering them." The subjects of these experiences frequently observe the second body, of whose existence they are not conscious most of the time, since in waking life "it is normally 'in gear' with the physical." Dr. Crookall is here referring to out-of-body experiences (OBEs) or what he and others tendentiously call "astral projections." The other evidence consists of the less frequent cases in which the astral body has become "exteriorized" and has actually been observed by other people. The latter of these phenomena are familiar to all students of the history of Christianity. It has been reported of numerous saints that they were seen in two places at the same time. Thus St. Anthony of Padua, whose sermon to the fishes has been immortalized in one of Gustav Mahler's most delightful songs, knelt to pray on Holy Thursday of 1226 in the Church of St. Pierre du Queyrrix at Limoges and at that very moment appeared at the other end of the town at another service. Sister Maria Coronel de Agreda, a seventeenth-century Spanish nun who modestly doubted her own gifts, had telepathic powers, was able to levitate, and underwent no less than five hundred bilocations. Just as saints and other members of religious orders

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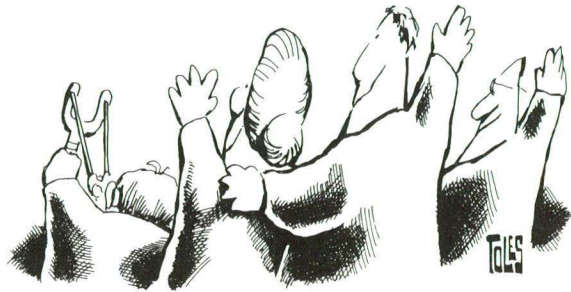
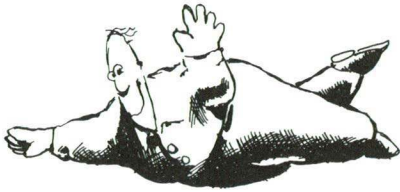
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no longer levitate, so they also have not engaged in bilocations in more recent centuries, but several secular cases have been reported during the past one hundred and fifty years. One that is often mentioned in the literature of occultism concerns Mme. Sagée, a schoolteacher in nineteenth-century France. Soon after her appointment, according to Dr. Crookall's account, rumors circulated that she had been seen far from the classroom where she was engaged in teaching. On one occasion when she was writing on the blackboard, Dr. Crookall writes, "all the girls saw not only her physical body but also her 'double' which made the same gestures" (op. cit., pp. 67-68). Perhaps the most distressing event occurred when she was helping to dress one of the girls, standing behind her. The girl happened to glance in the mirror and saw not one but two Mme. Sagées. She promptly fainted. After numerous complaints by parents the school authorities dismissed the unfortunate teacher. No information is available on whether she had engaged in acts of bilocation before her arrival at the school or whether she continued in such acts after her dismissal.

The most famous and, in the opinion of some, the best-documented case of bilocation, which no champion of the astral body ever fails to mention, is that of Mr. and Mrs. Wilmot. There is not enough space to relate the details of this case, but the following broad outline may suffice for our purposes. It concerns an alleged event on the *City of Limerick*, a steamship that sailed from Liverpool to New York on October 3, 1863. A severe storm lasting for nine days began on October 4. Mrs. Wilmot, at the family home in Connecticut, was acutely and justifiably worried about her husband's safety. On the eighth day of the storm Mr. Wilmot dreamed that his wife had entered his stateroom in a nightgown, lowered her head, gently kissed him, and had then withdrawn. A Mr. Tait, who shared Mr. Wilmot's stateroom, reported the next morning that he had observed a lady entering the room, hesitating for a moment, then walking up to Mr. Wilmot's berth and gently kissing him. When Mr. Wilmot returned to Connecticut his wife at once mentioned her visit and she reported noticing unusual features of the berths in the stateroom of the *City of Limerick*. The details of the case, supported by various documents, were published in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, vol. 7 (1891), and they have ever since been cited as evidence for the existence of an astral body. The independent corroboration of three witnesses, only one of whom (Mr. Wilmot) had any interest in psychical phenomena, was too remarkable to be explained in any other way. Professor C. D. Broad, who did not believe in the astral body, nevertheless called it a "very strange story" and took it seriously enough to devote several pages to it in his *Lectures on Psychical Research*. Susan Blackmore has gone to the trouble of studying the original documents in the archives of the Society for Psychical Research. After one reads the results of her investigation the case looks a great deal less impressive than it did when reported by Dr. Crookall or even by Professor Broad. What made the case so impressive was the apparent corroboration of Mr. Wilmot's dream by the testimony from Mr. Tait and from Mrs. Wilmot. Mr. Tait was dead by the time the case was written up twenty-seven years after the event occurred, and his corroboration is available only in a letter from Miss Wilmot, Mr. Wilmot's sister, who

also traveled on the *City of Limerick*. As for Mrs. Wilmot, the details of her supposed corroboration all come from Mr. Wilmot. She reported merely that she had had a "dream" that left her with a vivid sense the next day of having visited her husband. She at no stage asserted that she remembered flying over the ocean to the *City of Limerick* or that she recalled, in a dream or otherwise, walking into his stateroom and kissing him. Equally important, she at no time claimed to be aware of peculiar features of the berths in the stateroom. Since she knew about the dangerous storm and since another steamship had been reported lost, she was understandably anxious about her husband, and this seems to be a perfectly natural explanation for the dream she did report. It should be added that the Wilmot case is generally regarded as the best-supported case on record of a bilocation as well as an OBE in which a person could accurately perceive objects at a great distance from his physical body. (Susan Blackmore's discussions are found in "Are Out-of-Body Experiences Evidence for Survival?" *Anabiosis*, December 1983, and in a letter in the same journal, 1984, pp. 169-171.)

Bilocations are a myth, but OBEs are very real and there is not the slightest reason why a person who rejects the *theory* of the astral body should deny their reality. The term out-of-body experience has been simply and clearly defined by Blackmore as referring to "an experience in which one seems to perceive the world from a location outside the physical body" (*Beyond the Body*, p. 1). There is surely no question that many people in many countries at many different times have had such experiences. These experiences have certain common features: the individual can travel at enormous speed, he can penetrate material objects like walls, roofs, and human bodies as if these were not there, and he is not noticed by others. The last does not of course apply to bilocations, but I am disregarding these here. Certain further characteristics asserted to belong to all OBEs, both by Dr. Crookall and other astral theorists, are not in fact universal. The most important of these is the observation by a person of his second or duplicate body. Celia Green in her book *Out-of-Body Experiences* reports many cases in which the person perceived himself as a blob or globe, a flare or a point of light, or in which he simply "looks" at his original body and has no sense of possessing another one in the place from which he is looking. Some astral travelers have reported seeing an extremely elastic silver cord connecting the astral body to the sleeping physical body. It is also the belief of many astral theorists that, if the silver cord or "astral cable" is broken, the person must die. When a person dies, the cord breaks and this enables the astral body to leave for other regions. The supposed universality of the observation of the silver cord during OBEs has frequently been cited as conclusive evidence that they cannot be hallucinations. For this reason it should be emphasized that many reports of OBEs are on record without mention of a silver cord or, for that matter, any connecting link. Dr. Kübler-Ross, one of the outstanding astral travelers of our time, has not once reported seeing such a cord. If she should read about it, things might of course become different. Many of Celia Green's subjects do not report such a cord, and no astral cable appears in many of the OBEs reported in other cultures.



Needless confusion has been produced by an ambiguous use of the phrase “astral projection.” In one innocent sense it just means the same as OBE, and in *this* sense a person who denies the existence of the astral body does not deny the existence of astral projections—he objects to one particular explanation or interpretation of astral projections. Often, however, the term has been used to refer to the separation of the astral from the physical body, and of course in this sense, but only in this sense, an opponent of an astral body must deny the reality of astral projections. Charles P. Tart, a California psychologist, who is a warm friend of the astral body although he has never flatly asserted its existence, evidently has some difficulty in stating the position of skeptics. “The current physical science belief system,” he writes, “defines such experiences as meaningless and not at all as indicating the existence of any kind of soul.” To this Tart adds the reflection that “the physical world view is neither psychologically satisfying nor scientifically sound.” The former of these defects is presumably the result of its leading to “only one conclusion: death is the end for each of us” (“Out-of-Body Experiences,” in J. White, ed., *Psychic Explorations*, pp. 353–354). I do not believe that Tart really means “physical science,” for physics has nothing to say, one way or another, about OBEs or about the astral body. What he presumably means is the *philosophy* of empiricism, which has often been espoused by physicists and other scientists. The appropriate comment is that an empiricist would emphatically *not* deny the reality of OBEs. He would question whether they, or anything else, provide sufficient evidence for the astral body.

Dr. Crookall, the aforementioned doyen of astral theorists, was interviewed a few years before his death by Martin Ebon,

one of the leading psychic explorers in the New York City area. From all the thousands of cases with which Dr. Crookall was familiar, he picked an OBE by William Gerhardi as “perhaps the most complete and convincing on record.” It should be explained parenthetically that very many of Dr. Crookall’s correspondents were persons with little education, but Gerhardi (1896–1977) was a well-educated and talented novelist whose works received high praise from outstanding literary figures like H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw, among others. In 1934 he published a thinly disguised autobiography with the title *Resurrection*, in which he described his astral adventures. In the interview with Martin Ebon, Dr. Crookall produced extensive quotations from this book for which there is no space here. In the article cited earlier he offers the following summary:

Gerhardi used his released “double” as an instrument of the Soul—he used it to see, to will, to reason, etc. He set himself to accumulate proof that he was really freed from his physical body, in a non-physical body, and that it was no dream. He said “what evidence, what more evidence?” He went about noting which windows were shut, etc., matters that he could check when he re-entered his body. This he did and then thought, “We have a duplicate body, all there and ready to use, the almost-indistinguishable double of the physical body. It seems that, for the first stage of survival at least, we already have a body neatly folded away in our physical bodies, always at hand in case of death, or for special use.” [p. 70]

Dr. Crookall concurs with Gerhardi’s reasoning. “If a man can leave his physical body temporarily and continue to exist as a self-conscious being,” he told Martin Ebon, “the fact would prove a strong presumption that eventually when he comes to leave his physical body, i.e., to die, he will then also continue to exist as a self-conscious being in that second body” (M. Ebon, ed., *The Evidence for Life After Death*, p. 116).

### An Astral Grand Tour of the Next World

**T**he most obvious objection to believing in the astral double is that, aside from bilocations, which are difficult to take seriously, there is not the slightest observational evidence for its existence: nobody has observed it with his senses and no scientific instrument has ever detected it. This is indeed a valid objection, but I think that there are more basic considerations that justify us not only in not believing in the astral body but in *rejecting* it. To explain these considerations and to show the full absurdity of the astral theory I would like to present the case of Dr. George Ritchie, a Virginia psychiatrist, whose astral trip in December 1943 has frequently been hailed as one of the great events in astral history. Tributes to Dr. Ritchie’s epoch-making experience have come from many quarters. Thus Dr. Raymond Moody, who dedicated his best-selling *Life After Life* to “George Ritchie, M.D. and, through him, to the One whom he suggested,” has called Dr. Ritchie’s astral adventure “incredible,” “fantastic,” and “startling,” and he credits his own research into “post-mortem” experiences to his meeting in 1965 with this remarkable “clinical professor of psychiatry at the School of Medicine . . . who had been dead, not just once but

on two occasions about ten minutes apart.” (Dr. Ritchie has never been a clinical professor of psychiatry, and he was “dead” once and not twice, but it sounds better the way Moody puts it.) Canon Pearce-Higgins, coeditor of the abovementioned *Life, Death, and Psychological Research*, takes a special interest in those who have been to the Beyond—who, in the words of the seventeenth-century metaphysical poet Henry Vaughan, have “peeped into glory”—speaks of Dr. Ritchie in glowing terms as one such peeper. His “most remarkable projection,” his “round-the-astral-world trip,” was an experience of “immense range” and can be described as nothing less than “apocalyptic.”

It is regrettable that I do not have the space to offer here more than a very brief summary of this apocalyptic event. In December 1943 George Ritchie was a private in the U.S. Army, stationed at Camp Barkeley in Texas. Because of the shortage of physicians it was arranged that George would be released from his Army duties to take an accelerated degree at the Medical College of Virginia in his hometown of Richmond. He was supposed to catch a train to Richmond on December 20, but a few days earlier he became ill with pneumonia. During the night of December 20 his temperature was 106.5, and he collapsed while his chest was being X-rayed. Early in the morning the physician on duty, getting no pulse, respiration, or blood pressure, pronounced George dead and asked the ward boy to prepare George’s body for the morgue. A few minutes later the ward boy begged the physician to make an attempt to resuscitate George. This he did by injecting adrenalin into George’s heart muscle, and George gradually came back to life. George remained on the critical list for five days but eventually made a complete recovery.

George Ritchie himself has always been totally convinced that his resuscitation was the result of divine intervention. In a notarized statement several years after the event, Dr. Donald Francy, the commanding officer at Camp Barkeley, stated:

Private George G. Ritchie’s . . . virtual call from death and return to vigorous health has to be explained in terms of other than natural means. [Quoted from Dr. Ritchie’s book *Return From Tomorrow*, to be abbreviated as *RFT*, p. 81.]

In an interview in the *Toronto Star* in October 1970 Dr. Ritchie proudly displayed this testimonial and observed with becoming modesty that he could still not “fully fathom” why he of all people was “chosen to return to life.”

During the time when he was thought to be dead, Dr. Ritchie says that he remembers undergoing a succession of remarkable encounters. After lapsing into unconsciousness, he found himself sitting at the edge of his bed and looking with distaste at a body closely resembling his own. George was still intent on catching the train to Richmond. He therefore proceeded to put on his uniform and leave the hospital. In the corridor he met a sergeant who was carrying a tray with medical instruments. George told him to watch out since they were about to collide. The next moment the sergeant went right through George without either of them feeling anything. Before he knew it, George was outside the hospital flying at great speed in the direction of Richmond. At one stage, when he

reached the town of Vicksburg, he descended to the ground, but discovered, much to his astonishment, that he was unable to touch any objects. He tried to start a conversation with a man but was ignored. He then tapped the man’s shoulder but his fingers went right through him. George realized that it was pointless to proceed to Richmond and he therefore decided to return to the hospital. After a series of harrowing experiences in the course of which he tried to talk to nurses, orderlies, X-ray technicians, and physicians, but was never once noticed by any of them, he finally found the small isolation room in which he had “died.” He was acutely puzzled when he saw his own dead body lying in bed and realized that he had two bodies looking exactly alike:

I could see this body lying there on the bed but I was the being that was, in every way, shape and form, just as big as the one on the bed. [Quoted from Dr. Ritchie’s “I Found Life Beyond Death,” *Fate*, December 1970, p. 45.]

Before long, an intensely luminous being made of nothing but light appeared, and George at once realized that he was in the presence of Jesus, the Son of God. Dr. Ritchie makes it clear that this Jesus was no “weakling” or “sissy,” but on the contrary “the most totally male Being” he had ever met. During a momentous conversation about the “point” of life, which was carried on in thoughts rather than in words, George began to fall in love with Jesus. All the familiar symptoms of an amatory attachment were present. George realized that he “did not want to leave Him—I knew that I never wanted to be without Him again” (*Fate*, p. 47). When, finally, George returned to life on the earth he was heartbroken and felt and acted like a lover who had been separated from his beloved. Writing twenty years after the fateful meeting with Jesus he remarks:

The cry in my heart that moment has been the cry of my life ever since: Christ, show me Yourself again. [Quoted from Dr. Ritchie’s contribution to J. E. Weiss, ed., *The Vestibule*, p. 67.]

The rest of the story concerns the fascinating grand tour of the next world that so greatly impressed Canon Pearce-Higgins and Dr. Moody. Here at last a human being could see for himself what hell and heaven were like. Dr. Ritchie is after all a psychiatrist who can tell delusions from veridical experiences, Canon Pearce-Higgins observes, and we have Dr. Ritchie’s own unqualified assurance that he saw the real thing. The hellish regions came first. George witnessed the dreadful tortures suffered by suicides, alcoholics, violently angry types, and sexual perverts. It must be emphasized that all these dead people had lost their regular bodies and were now living in their astral doubles. What is more, their punishments were intimately connected with the “lack of solidity” of their astral housing. The violent types, for example, appeared to be “writhing, punching, and gouging” and they were obviously out for blood. Yet, since they “had no substance,” there never were any injuries and the frustration was unbearable. The same was true of the sexual perverts, who were “tied up in all kinds of lewd relationships” and performing “sexual abuses in feverish pantomime.” Per-

versions that George had never dreamed of “were being vainly attempted all around.” The attempts were of course vain since none of these beings could make physical contact. There is a striking similarity between some of Dr. Ritchie’s recollections and Dante’s descriptions in the *Inferno*. I have no doubt that this similarity is wholly accidental, unless, of course, Dante’s astral body also paid a visit to the next world.

The heavenly spheres were much less exciting. In one area George was shown “astro-laboratories” in which scientists who wore “loose-floating hooded cloaks” appeared to be engaged in some “vast experiment.” Later George was introduced to a realm inhabited by composers, painters, and inventors. The music was of extreme complexity and George realized that “Bach was only the beginning,” an opinion that would be endorsed by many earthbound music lovers. Although the astro-scientists and the astro-artists seemed extremely serene and totally devoted to their work, something was clearly missing from their lives. What was missing, George realized, was the love of Jesus. They were indeed single-mindedly pursuing the truth, but this very pursuit seemed to distract them “from the Truth Himself . . . standing in their midst” (*RFT*, p. 71). Finally, George saw “infinitely far off” a city of light. This was the highest region and in fact it *was* Heaven. It was populated by beings who had truly been saved and who were composed, like Jesus, of nothing but light. These “radiant beings,” George reasoned, were former inhabitants of the earth who, unlike the suicides, the alcoholics, and the perverts, and also unlike the selfless scholars, “had indeed kept Jesus [as] the focus of their lives.” They had “looked for Him in everything,” and they had done this “so well and so closely that they had been changed into His very likeness” (*ibid.*, pp. 72-73). All of a sudden, for reasons we shall never know, two of these radiant beings “hurled themselves across that infinity with the speed of light” toward the location occupied by George and Jesus, but, disproving Einstein’s special theory of relativity, George and Jesus “drew away still faster.” This was effectively the end of the grand tour. Suddenly the travelers were back in the hospital room in Texas. Jesus intimated to George that he must resume his life on earth. George was desperate and begged Jesus not to leave him, but Jesus would not relent. He did however make George’s reentry into his physical body as painless as possible by “spiritually anesthetizing” his “psychic being.” George then lost consciousness and he knew nothing more until he woke up again on the morning of December 24.

In fairness to George and Jesus, I should observe that this brief summary does not adequately convey the majestic sweep of this extraordinary visit to the hereafter. The brevity of my account, however, is not the only reason the reader will not be fully informed about this stupendous event. Dr. Ritchie himself has insisted in several places that, apparently on divine orders, he has not been permitted to reveal all that happened. We can only pray that before long the supernatural prohibition will be lifted and that the entire story will at last be given to the world. Perhaps a joint appeal by President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev on behalf of the human race would persuade Dr. Ritchie to open up. If that fails we could always ask Dr. Goldberg to intercede. I am confident that neither Dr. Ritchie nor the Deity could resist his imprecations.

## Astral Tribulations

Entertainment has not been my main reason for telling this tale of exploration and love. I have told it because it will enable me to explain more clearly than I could in general terms what is wrong with the astral theory. I will begin with some questions about George’s uniform. It will be remembered that at the beginning of his “post-mortem” journey George’s astral body put on his uniform. This was his regular U.S. Army uniform. George reports no difficulty of any kind in putting on the uniform. He was wearing this uniform when an orderly with a tray of medical instruments went right through him. He was wearing it when he descended from the sky into a street at Vicksburg to start a conversation with a stranger, and he was still wearing it during his search for his original body after his return to Camp Barkeley. There is also no suggestion that George disrobed after the arrival of Jesus, and we may assume that he was wearing his uniform throughout the tour of the hereafter. The last stage of the trip is shrouded in obscurity, but it seems clear that George was in no position to remove his uniform. However, neither the physician nor the orderly reported that George was wearing his uniform when they began their resuscitation attempt. So far as I know, the uniform was not missing, and it was on the same chair or hangers on which it had been placed when George was taken to the X-ray room. It should be noted in passing that Dr. Ritchie never explained how the uniform was transferred from his astral body to its original location.

Several things about this account make no sense. To begin with, an astral body could never wear a regular uniform. It lacks the solidity to keep any kind of clothing in place. If George had succeeded in getting a grip on the clothes (which by his own astral assumptions is impossible), they would have fallen to the floor. Let us suppose, however, that he somehow worked the miracle of clothing his astral body in a regular uniform. In that case the uniform would not have been invisible to others, and it could also not have been penetrated as if it occupied no space. The sergeant with the tray of instruments could not have failed to witness the remarkable spectacle of a uniform walking toward him without a man inside. He would also most surely have collided with the uniform if he had tried to walk through the space it occupied. The same applies to the man whom George tapped on the shoulder in Vicksburg and to all the people he met after his return to the hospital—the soldiers, nurses, orderlies, and the X-ray technician. Such a remarkable sight—of a uniform without a man, walking, flying, and descending to the road—would surely have been reported by those who saw it, but to the best of my knowledge no such reports were ever filed. To be invisible and to avoid collision with the orderly, George would have had to wear an astral uniform. I have been assured by the Department of Defense that the U.S. Army does not supply such uniforms to its soldiers.

George Ritchie’s uniform is of course merely one instance of the general problem of astral attire. I am not aware of a single case of bilocation in which an astral double was observed without clothes. When St. Anthony of Padua preached in two

different churches in Limoges at the same time he was wearing his usual clerical robes during both sermons. As for Mme. Sagée, the nineteenth-century French bilocationist, she surely shocked her students sufficiently by appearing in two places without being naked in either one of her apparitions. Mrs. Wilmot's visit to her ailing husband greatly shocked the prudish Mr. Tait, the occupant of the upper berth, but he did not assert that she came in the nude. On the contrary, all parties agreed that she was wearing her nightgown. In some reports of "private" OBEs, in which the traveler's astral body is not publicly observable, the double was naked, but in most of them it did wear garments just like those worn by regular bodies. Now, the clothes worn by astral doubles cannot be ordinary clothes for the reasons already explained. The only alternative seems to be that they are astral clothes, but where are astral clothes manufactured and how do they suddenly appear on the scene when a bilocation or a private OBE occurs?

In one of his most intriguing books, *The Next World—And the Next*, given to this world in 1966, Dr. Crookall has brought together the opinions of astral scholars on this topic. The book incidentally also deals at length with the fascinating questions of the precise location of "Hades" (the next world) and of "Paradise" (the world after the next world). Dr. Crookall reports a number of cases in which the astral body was indeed naked but invariably became mysteriously clothed when the person felt embarrassed. This does not suggest to him that we are dealing with dreamlike experiences but rather that the laws of the astral world differ from those of the familiar physical universe. In any event, the great majority of astral bodies wear clothes that look just like those worn by their physical counterparts. Dr. Crookall favors the view of the anonymous author of *Life Beyond the Grave*, a work published in London in 1876 that appears to be based on unimpeachable messages from the Beyond. This anonymous author wrote that "there is a spiritual duplicate to every physical object," and Dr. Crookall is quick to point out that "if this is the case our clothes possess etheric (astral) doubles that are invisible to the physical eye" (p. 38). Substantially the same position has been advocated by the early theosophist leaders Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, who maintain that, although the astral world is richer than the ordinary physical world in that it contains many objects that do not correspond to anything in the physical world, the astral world does contain an accurate copy of every regular physical object. This is an ingenious theory, but when its implications are worked out it may perhaps seem slightly farfetched. It would mean that every time somebody produces something, he also produces an astral copy of that thing. A carpenter who builds a set of bookshelves is really building two sets—the regular one he sells to his customer and an astral copy he sells to nobody. And the same of course applies to everything. A dentist, for example, who fills a tooth is really filling the tooth he thinks he is filling as well as its astral duplicate, and when I am writing these lines I am really writing them twice at the same time. This is too much. I would rather believe that all astral bodies are always naked and that we are deluding ourselves when we observe them clothed. If it were not needed for reincarnation one might almost be tempted to give up the astral body.

The problem of astral clothes, though tricky, is not the worst difficulty facing astral believers. Another has to do with the known dependence of memories on the brain. George Ritchie's astral body is supposed to have made the grand tour while his regular body was out of action. Memory traces of the experiences during this trip were produced in the astral brain and *not* in George's regular brain. They could not have been produced in the regular brain since the regular body was not in the various places visited during the trip. However, it is the George Ritchie with the regular body who, ever since he awoke from unconsciousness on December 24, 1943, has claimed to remember the events that took place during the visit to the next world. How could the appropriate memory traces have been produced in George's regular brain? Do astral brains by some kind of sympathetic magic produce duplicate traces in regular brains upon "reentry"? If they do not, the astral theorist is condemned to the view that here, but not in the case of any other genuine memories, the person can remember the events without appropriate memory traces in the brain. Even if there is an astral brain with memory traces, clearly nobody has or can have the slightest evidence that they produce duplicate traces in the regular brain at the moment of reentry. The alternative that here and only here a person can remember without memory traces in the brain goes against everything we know about the physiologically necessary conditions for memories. The difficulty seems fatal either way. This objection may not faze astral theorists who, along with other occultists and also more respectable believers in survival, seriously believe in what

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they call “extra-cerebral” memory. In the section in which I discuss the dependence of consciousness on the brain I will explain why all such talk should be dismissed as absurd, but only if it is not absurd could there be a reply to the difficulty just mentioned.

The next problem for the astral believer is that of synchronization between the regular and the astral body, not just between the two brains. It will be remembered that the astral body is supposed to be an exact duplicate of the regular body. If the astral body leaves the regular body of a boy aged ten, it will look just like the boy looks then; if it leaves the body of the same person at the age of eighty, it will look like the regular body at the age of eighty. The astral bodies of men will look like the regular bodies of men and the astral bodies of women like the regular bodies of women. If a boxer has just been punched in the face resulting in a flattened nose and the loss of three front teeth, his astral body will show the same flattened nose and the same gap in his mouth. If the boxer retires and eats a great deal so that he becomes enormously fat, his astral body too will be enormous. If a woman in her prime, with soft and unblemished skin, were to take an astral trip, the skin of her astral body would be soft and fresh. However, if the same woman were to take a trip many years later when her skin has become parched and wrinkled, this would also be true of her astral double. Astral believers prefer to state their theory in very general terms and usually flinch when such specific consequences are derived from it, but there is no doubt at all that these and similar statements about the appearance of astral doubles are really implied by the theory.

Now, the question that at once arises is how this exact synchronization is achieved. Except when it is released for a journey the astral body resides inside the regular body. However, the exact state of the regular body at any given time is very largely the result of its movements and of influences upon it coming from its environment. To secure the synchronization required by astral theory we will have to postulate that corresponding to every physical act and movement there occurs an astral act and movement: Corresponding to every ordinary breath, every normal meal, every physical exertion, every conversation, every sexual act, every injury, there must occur a corresponding astral process. Surely no sane person can believe that this happens. One would think that while it is safely “tucked” away inside the regular body, the astral body cannot do anything at all. But this is not all. One of the key propositions of astral theory that we have met on several occasions makes most of the external influences on the astral body quite impossible. I am referring to all events in the person’s life involving physical contact. According to the believer, the astral body cannot touch or be touched by another body, physical or astral. When our prize fighter had his nose flattened and three of his teeth knocked out, the corresponding damage to his astral body was *not* possible. Similarly, insofar as eating involves physical contact between various parts of the body and the food consumed, it cannot have an astral counterpart, and there is no way of explaining how the astral body becomes enormous if the regular body overeats.

The astral tribulations I have so far explained would show that there cannot be a second body of the kind asserted by

astral believers. It would undermine the position not only of those who believe that there is an astral body that will survive as the bearer of our consciousness but also of anybody who merely believes in the astral double regardless of its use for survival purposes. But let us for the sake of argument grant that all of us possess an astral body. There are two reasons for supposing that it cannot help the cause of survival. The first is the evidence we have that our consciousness depends for its existence on the regular body and especially the regular brain and not on any other body or brain. I will discuss this in a later section. The second reason I will spell out now. Astral philosophy teaches that, except for its “lack of solidity,” the astral body is an *exact* double of the regular one. Without this assumption the theory would not explain the facts or alleged facts of bilocation. However, if the astral body is an exact duplicate of the regular body it must die along with the regular body. This entirely reasonable conclusion seems to have escaped all astral theorists. If the secular body died as the result of a brain tumor or as the result of being shot through the heart, the astral brain and the astral heart must have been similarly injured. It is evident that if a person is to survive death he will need some other vehicle.

## The Dependence of Consciousness on the Brain

**I**n now come to what seems to me the most important argument against survival after death in all its most familiar forms. I am in the habit of calling it “the body-mind dependence argument.” The argument is already found in Lucretius, who stated the basic idea long before anything was known about the connection between consciousness and the brain:

The understanding is begotten along with the body, and grows together with it, and along with it comes to old age. For as children totter with feeble and tender body, so a weak judgement of mind goes with it. Then when their years are ripe and their strength hardened, greater is their sense and increased their force of mind. Afterward, when now the body is shattered by the stern strength of time, and the frame has sunk with its force dulled, then the reason is maimed, the tongue raves, the mind stumbles, all things give way and fail at once. And so it is natural that all the nature of the mind should also be dissolved, even as is smoke, into the high breezes of the air; inasmuch as we see that it is born with the body, grows with it, and, as I have shown, at the same time becomes weary and worn with age. [*De Rerum Natura*, trans. by Cyril Bailey, Oxford, 1910, pp. 120-121]

The argument is found in Pomponazzi, Voltaire (who pretended to but did not in fact believe in immortality), Hume, Russell, Ayer, and numerous contemporary philosophers. It is stated very effectively, with specific reference to the dependence of conscious states on the brain, by J. J. C. Smart in the article on “Religion and Science” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. To allow reincarnationism to get off the ground I am throughout these articles assuming dualism. Smart maintains that mental states are identical with brain states and is thus not a dualist, but he endorses the body-mind dependence argument

as valid within a dualistic framework:

Even if some form of philosophical dualism is accepted and the mind is thought of as something over and above the body, the empirical evidence in favor of an invariable correlation between mental states and brain states is extremely strong: that is, the mind may be thought of as in some sense distinct from the body but also as fundamentally dependent upon physical states. Without oxygen or under the influence of anesthetics or soporific drugs, we rapidly lose consciousness. Moreover, the quality of our consciousness can be influenced in spectacular ways by appropriate drugs or by mechanical stimulation of different areas of the brain. In the face of all the evidence that is being accumulated by modern research in neurology, it is hard to believe that after the dissolution of the brain there could be any thought or conscious experience whatever. [vol. 7, p. 161]

I will add one other recent formulation, which states the argument simply and forcefully and is based on the most recent evidence from neurology. "What we call 'the mind,'" writes Colin McGinn,

is in fact made up of a great number of sub-capacities, and each of these depends upon the functioning of the brain.

Now, the facts of neurology

compellingly demonstrate . . . that everything about the mind, from the sensory-motor periphery to the inner sense of self, is minutely controlled by the brain: if your brain lacks certain chemicals or gets locally damaged, your mind is apt to fall apart at the seams. . . . If parts of the mind depend for their existence upon parts of the brain, then the whole of the mind must so depend too. Hence the soul dies with the brain, which is to say it is mortal. [*London Review of Books*, January 23, 1986, pp. 24–25]

It should be emphasized that this argument does *not* start from the premise that after a person is dead he never again acts in the world. A correspondent in the *London Review* replied to McGinn by observing that we do not need his or the neuropathologist's "assistance to learn that all behavior stops at death." Similarly, John Stuart Mill in his chapter on "Immortality" in *Three Essays on Religion* thought the argument inconclusive on the ground that the absence of any acts by an individual after his death is as consistent with the view that he will "recommence" his existence "elsewhere" as it is with the assumption that he has been extinguished forever. Such remarks are due to a misunderstanding. The body-mind dependence argument is based on the observed dependence of our mental states and processes and not only our behavior on the body and the brain.

It should be noted that, if valid, the argument does not merely rule out the survival of human beings as disembodied minds. It equally tells against reincarnation and also against the view that the mind will go on existing in conjunction with a resurrection replica. This is so because it concludes that my mind depends on *my* brain. It does not merely support the less specific conclusion that my mind needs *some* brain as its

foundation. If my mind is finished when my brain dies, then it cannot transmigrate to any other body. Similarly, if God created a duplicate of my body containing a duplicate of my brain, *my* mind would not be able to make use of it since it stopped existing with the death of my original body.

Not only reincarnationist believers in survival therefore have a stake in rebutting this argument. I am familiar with a great many such rebuttals, but all the more significant ones can be reduced to two. Before looking at these rejoinders I would like to consider two concrete cases of body-mind dependence. These will help to bring out the full force of the argument. The first is Alzheimer's disease, a dreadful affliction that ruins the last years of a sizable percentage of the world's population. Almost everybody above the age of thirty has known some elderly relative or friend afflicted with this illness. I can therefore be brief in my description of what happens to Alzheimer patients. In the early stages the person misses appointments, he constantly loses and mislays objects, and he frequently cannot recall events in the recent past. As the illness progresses he can no longer read or write and his speech tends to be incoherent. In nursing homes Alzheimer patients commonly watch television, but there is no evidence that they understand what is happening on the screen. The decline in intellectual function is generally accompanied by severe emotional symptoms, such as extreme irritability and violent reactions to persons in the environment, as well as hallucinations and paranoid fears. In the final stages the patient is totally confused, frequently incontinent, and quite unable to recognize anybody, including the closest relatives and friends. At present Alzheimer's is incurable and, unlike in the case of Parkinson's disease, there are no known means of slowing down the deterioration. It is also as yet a mystery why Alzheimer's strikes certain individuals while sparing the majority of old people. However, a great deal is known about what goes on in the brains of Alzheimer patients. Alois Alzheimer, the neurologist after whom the disease is named, found in 1906 that the cerebral cortex and the hippocampus of his patients contained twisted tangles and filaments as well as abnormal neurites known as "neuritic" or "senile plaques." It has since been determined that the density of these abnormal components is directly proportional to the severity of the disorder. Autopsies have shown that Alzheimer victims have a vastly reduced level of an enzyme called "choline acetyltransferase," which is needed for producing the neurotransmitter acetylcholine. Although the reduced level of the enzyme and the neurotransmitter appear in the cortex, the origin of the trouble lies in another region of the brain, the nucleus basalis, which is situated just above the place where the optic nerves meet and cross. Autopsies have revealed a dramatic loss of neurons from the nucleus basalis in Alzheimer victims, and this explains why so little of the enzyme is manufactured in their brains.

The information just summarized has been culled from articles about Alzheimer's that have appeared in magazines and popular science monthlies in recent years. The authors of these articles are evidently not concerned with the question of survival after death, but they invariably use such phrases as "destruction of the mind" in describing what happens to the victims. In an article in *Science* 84 entitled "The Clouded

Mind," the author, Michael Shodell, speaks of Alzheimer's as "an illness that destroys the mind, leaving the body behind as a grim reminder of the person who once was there." Similarly, the cover story in *Newsweek* for December 3, 1984, which contained many heart-rending illustrations and listed some of the famous men and women who are suffering from Alzheimer's, was entitled "A Slow Death of the Mind." I think that these descriptions are entirely appropriate: A person who can no longer read or write, whose memory has largely disappeared, whose speech is incoherent, and who is totally indifferent to his environment has in effect lost all or most of what we normally call his mind. The relevance of this to our discussion is obvious. While still alive, an Alzheimer patient's brain is severely damaged and most of his mind has disappeared. After his death his brain is not merely damaged but completely destroyed. It is surely logical to conclude that now his mind is also gone. It seems preposterous to assert that, when the brain is completely destroyed, the mind suddenly returns intact, with its emotional and intellectual capacities, including its memory, restored. How does the *complete* destruction of the brain bring about a cure that has so far totally eluded medical science?

The same obviously applies to people in irreversible comas. Karen Ann Quinlan lay in a coma for over ten years before she finally died. The damage to her brain had made her, in the phrase used by the newspapers, nothing more than a "vegetable." Her E.E.G. was flat; she was unable to speak or write; visits by her foster parents did not register the slightest response. A more recent widely publicized case was that of the great American tenor Jan Peerce. Peerce had amazed the musical public by singing right into his seventies with only a slight decline in his vocal powers. In the end, however, he was felled by two severe strokes, and he spent the last year of his life in an irreversible coma. Relatives and friends could get no response of any kind. Peerce died in December 1984, and Karen Ann Quinlan in June 1985. Did the total destruction of the bodies of these individuals suddenly bring back their emotional and intellectual capacities? If so, where were these during the intervening periods?

The first of the two rejoinders I will consider does not dispute the manifold dependence of mental functions on brain processes. It is claimed, however, that these facts are not inconsistent with survival. They are indeed compatible with the view that the mind is annihilated at death, but they are also compatible with the very different position that the mind continues to exist but has lost its "instrument" for manifesting itself in the world and hence for communicating with people who are still alive. Variants of this argument are found in numerous Protestant theologians of the early decades of the twentieth century, in Catholic writers and also in a number of purely secular philosophers like James, Schiller, and McTaggart.

In the 1976 BBC program on the Ryall case, Ian Stevenson used precisely this rejoinder in response to his two critics, Professors John Cohen and John Taylor. It is his contention that brain damage, no matter how severe, does not destroy a person's memories since they may continue to exist in another "dimension." I quoted part of their exchanges at the end of Part I. Here are some of the other highlights bearing on our topic. Stevenson is replying to the contention that brain damage

may wipe out certain of a person's memories:

STEVENSON: Well, it's possible that what is affected is his ability to express memories that he may still have.

TAYLOR: But are you suggesting, in fact, that memories themselves are in some way non-physically bound up, and can be stored in a non-physical manner?

STEVENSON: Yes, I'm suggesting there might be a non-physical process of storage.

TAYLOR: What does that mean? Non-physical storage of what?

STEVENSON: The potentiality for the reproduction of an image memory.

TAYLOR: But information itself involves energy. Is there such a thing as non-physical energy?

STEVENSON: I think there may be, yes.

TAYLOR: How can you define it? Non-physical energy, to me, is a complete contradiction in terms. I can't understand how on earth you could ever conceive of such a quantity.

STEVENSON: Well, it might be in some dimension of which we are just beginning to form crude ideas, through the study of what we parapsychologists call paranormal phenomena. We are making an assumption of some kind of process that is not, and maybe cannot be, understood in terms of current physical concepts. That is a jump, a gap, I freely admit.

I will return to Stevenson's "jumps" later on, though I should observe in passing that the "dimension" of which he was "just beginning to form crude ideas" turns out to be nothing other than the astral plane or a close cousin thereof. Right now I would like to show that the rejoinder under discussion is hopelessly inadequate. By retrodictive extrapolation to cases like Alzheimer patients or people in comas one can see that the alternative it proposes to the annihilation theory is absurd. Let us consider the behavior of Alzheimer patients in the later stages of their affliction. The more specific the case, the clearer the implications of the rival views will appear. The mother of a close friend of mine, Mrs. D., recently died from Alzheimer's after suffering from the disease for about eight years. Mrs. D. was a prosperous lady from Virginia, the widow of a banker. In her pre-Alzheimer days she was a courteous and well-behaved person, and she had of course no difficulty recognizing her daughter or any of her other relatives or friends. I do not know what her feelings were about paralyzed people, but my guess is that she pitied them and certainly had no wish to beat them up. As her illness progressed she was put into a nursing home run by nuns who were renowned for their gentle and compassionate ways. She shared a room with an older lady who was paralyzed. For the first year or so Mrs. D. did not become violent. Then she started hitting the nurses. At about the time when she could no longer recognize her daughter, she beat up the paralyzed lady on two or three occasions. From then on she had to be confined to the "seventh floor," which was reserved for violent and exceptionally difficult patients. Let us now see what the survival theorists would have to say about Mrs. D.'s behavior. It should be remembered that on this view Mrs. D., after her death, will exist with her mind intact and will only lack the means of communicating with

people on earth. This view implies that throughout her affliction with Alzheimer's Mrs. D.'s mind *was* intact. She recognized her daughter but had lost her ability to express this recognition. She had no wish to beat up an inoffensive paralyzed old woman. On the contrary, "inside" she was the same considerate person as before the onset of the illness. It is simply that her brain disease prevented her from acting in accordance with her true emotions. I must insist that these *are* the implications of the theory that the mind survives the death of the brain and that the brain is only an instrument for communication. Surely these consequences are absurd: The facts are that Mrs. D. no longer recognized her daughter and that she no longer had any compassionate feelings about paralyzed old women. At any rate, we have the same grounds for saying this as we do in any number of undisputed cases in which people do not suffer from Alzheimer's and fail to recognize other human beings or fail to feel compassion.

The guards in Argentine dungeons who tortured and killed liberals had no compassion for their victims, and neither of course did the Nazis who rounded up and then shot Jews in Poland and elsewhere. We have exactly the same kind of evidence for concluding that Mrs. D., who probably did feel compassion for paralyzed people before she suffered from Alzheimer's, no longer felt compassion when beating up her paralyzed roommate. As for memories, all of us sometimes cannot place a familiar tune or remember the name of a person we know well; and in such cases it makes good sense to say that the memories are still there. Even when the name never comes back there is a suspicion that the memory may not have been lost: It is entirely possible that one could bring it back under hypnosis. However, the memory loss in Alzheimer's is totally different, and the same of course applies to people in irreversible comas. It is surely fantastic to maintain that during his last months Jan Peerce did recognize his wife and children and simply could not express his recognition. If anybody makes such a claim it can only be for ulterior metaphysical reasons and not because it is supported by the slightest evidence.

The second rejoinder is similar to one we already discussed briefly in connection with Tertullian's argument. It is sometimes confusingly amalgamated with the first rejoinder, but it is a distinct argument and should be evaluated on its own. It involves a distinction between the mind, which is identical with the phenomenal or empirical self, and another nonphysical entity to which various labels have been applied and which is the metaphysical soul of our earlier discussion. It is argued that, although the mind may indeed so closely depend on the body that it must cease with the body's death, the same is not true of the soul. The soul is the "I" that "owns" both the body and the mind. I am five feet seven inches tall, I weigh one hundred and fifty pounds, I have blue eyes and brown hair; but I also have certain sensations and feelings and thoughts. I have various physical skills, and I also possess certain emotional and intellectual dispositions. It is this underlying "I"—the subject of both the body and the mind—that has not been shown to require a body for its existence.

There are two objections to this rejoinder, each of them fatal. In the first place, although the way we speak in certain contexts suggests an underlying subject of both body and mind,

there is no reason to suppose that it exists. Hume's theory that human minds are nothing but "bundles of impressions and ideas" is seriously inadequate. Each of us, at least while he is sane, has a sense of his self, more specifically, a sense of himself as continuing the same person from moment to moment. However, what this consists in is not the totally unchanging and metaphysical entity that Hume rightly rebelled against. It is a sense of continuity in certain bodily sensations (especially of our limbs and certain muscle groups) and of our various tastes, opinions, and habits—more generally of our emotional and intellectual dispositions. These, together with our bodies, make us the kinds of persons we are. Although our emotional and intellectual dispositions are subject to change, they are, unlike our moods and sensations, relatively stable. If this is what is meant by "soul," there is no reason to deny that we have a soul; but the soul in this sense is just as dependent on the body and the brain as any particular sensations, feelings, and thoughts.

I already briefly explained the second objection in the discussion of Tertullian's argument. If there were such a thing as a metaphysical soul, it would not be what anybody means by "I." The great seventeenth-century philosopher Pierre Gassendi, who was both a Catholic priest and an atomistic materialist, professed to believe in such a soul. He also believed that insanity was a brain disease. Since the soul or reason (Gassendi preferred the latter word) did not depend on the body, he concluded quite consistently that the soul or reason remained sane even when the individual had become insane. Gassendi's consistency led to a *reductio ad absurdum* of his position. If I go mad and if at the same time my soul remains sane then my soul is not me. ●

*The fourth and final part of this series will discuss the status of a person between incarnations (What is he? and Where is he?) and it will show why Ian Stevenson's much-touted cases of child memories of earlier lives have no evidential value.—EDS.*

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